

LOVE THY NEIGHBOR

By

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MUTUAL CHARITY

1. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

Is it not remarkable that seven of the Ten Commandments relate directly to my relations with my fellowmen? I am to honor and obey my parents and lawful superiors; I am to respect the character, the person, and the worldly goods of my neighbor. That is the summary of my duties to others. And Our Lord epitomizes the Ten Commandments in the two great Precepts of the Law —Thou shalt love the Lord thy God. . . and thy neighbor as thyself, —Love, says Saint Paul, —is the fulfilling of the law.

It is interesting to compare the accounts given by Saints Matthew, Mark, and Luke of the occasion upon which Our Lord quoted the Law as written in the Book of Leviticus. He had —not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it. And He wished to point out especially two essential duties—those to God and those to our fellowmen.

Saint Matthew (before relating the incident I am about to consider) said, “The multitudes were in admiration at His doctrine. But the Pharisees, hearing that He had silenced the Sadducees, came together, and one of them, a doctor of the law, asked Him, tempting Him saying, “Master, which is the greatest Commandment of the law?” Jesus said to him, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with thy whole mind! This is the greatest and the first Commandment. And the second is like to this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments dependeth the whole law and the prophets.”

Saint Mark’s account reads, “And there came one of the scribes that had heard them reasoning together; and, seeing that He had answered well, asked Him which was the first Commandment of all. And Jesus said, “Thou shalt love thy God . . . and thy neighbor as thyself. There is no other commandment greater than these.” And the scribe said to Him, “Well, Master, Thou hast said in truth that there is one God . . . and that He should be loved with the whole heart . . . and to love one’s neighbor as one’s self is a greater thing than all holocausts and sacrifices.” Jesus, seeing that he had answered wisely, said to him, “Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.”

Saint Luke says, “A certain lawyer stood up, tempting Him, saying, ‘Master, what must I do to possess eternal life?’ But He said to him, ‘What is written in the law: How readest thou?’ He, answering said, ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and thy neighbor as thyself.’ And He said to him, ‘Thou hast answered right. This do; and thou shalt live.’ But he, willing to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’ ”

A very important question received a reply that can leave no possible doubt as to who my neighbor is. Now follows the Parable of the Good Samaritan and, by its teaching, I learn that all

mankind are my neighbors—from my closest friend to the stranger I pass by heedlessly.

Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Our Lord did not merely say, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor.” Instead, he said, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as (thou dost love) thyself.”

How do I love myself?

Well, I am careful of my creature comforts in the first place. I cherish my body, I clothe it becomingly, and I nourish it and keep it in good health. I like to have a pleasant time. I pick out the easiest way to tread. I am self-indulgent. I have a great respect for my own opinion. I am very touchy about what others think and say of me. I am always watching for slights, ready to resent unkindness and criticism. I have a proper pride in my reputation. I am jealous of my good name. If it is called in question, I flare up indignantly. If I am maligned, I give back as good as I get and if I am gossiped about, I soon tell the tale-tellers what I think about them. I take good care that my actions are not misrepresented. I seek praise when I have done well. I love to be sought after and to be popular and admired. Yes, I have a great affection for myself and I am ready to go to any amount of trouble to secure my personal safety and well-being.

I must consider my neighbor’s temporal well-being, for I am concerned about my own. I may not turn a deaf ear to the cry of the poor. If I take the easier path, I must move aside a little and let my neighbor share it with me. If I avoid trouble, I must not put it upon another. If I am touchy about my good name, resentful of malice and criticism, I must resent and put a stop to my unkind chattering about my fellows. Instead of tearing the character of absent persons to pieces, I must defend them, as I should wish them to defend me in my absence. If a friend of mine does well, I must seek to be the first to say, “Well done.” I must crush that mean spirit of jealousy in my heart. If I admire my own qualities so much, surely I will discover many more to esteem in others. As I am ready to take infinite trouble for myself, I must be prepared to take it for my fellow creatures—that it, if I really wish to regulate my life by the great Precept.

In short, I must love my neighbor as myself and it looks as if the more I love myself, the more I must love my neighbor.

But how do I really follow my Savior’s command? I hardly follow it at all. I indulge in unkind conversation, gossip, and harsh criticism. I judge rashly. I look at the worst side. I bear tales. I give scandal.

And I tell myself that I have nothing to say when I go to Confession! Let me give my conscience a bit of examination on these points.

2. Ordinary Conversation

The ordinary conversation of the average person is not interesting. I travel by train or plane and people are talking on all sides. I walk down the street and stray sentences catch my ear. I sit in a restaurant and a perfect babel of conversation rises everywhere.

What are people talking about? It might be instructive to listen in.

Sometimes they talk about money, how someone has made a good bargain, how another has been done, perhaps the usual grumble about expenses and high prices. Others discuss ailments and operations; others, again, the domestic problem, the scarcity of help in the home,

unsatisfactory service people, or the troublesome employee.

Practically always people are discussing their fellow creatures.

What is my chief topic of conversation? Is it about my neighbor? And, if so, is it upon their best side that I prefer to dwell?

I am afraid that I look upon unkind talk as a minor venial sin. I do not bother about the sharp criticism and uncharitable remarks I continually make. I may not intend to be deliberately unkind, but my whole attitude to my neighbors is censorious—trying to catch them out in some fault and hastily summing up my own idea of their actions. I do not set out to find good. Rather, I am ready to pounce upon any evil I can find in others—needless to say, not in myself.

If I submitted my own conscience to as searching a scrutiny as that to which I subject the characters of even my dearest friends, my Confessions would be far more thorough. This habit of constant carping, always saying the worst of my acquaintances, harshly condemning whatever they do, is a sin that does my own character a great deal of harm. It leaves me with a smug feeling of satisfaction that I am not as others—like the Pharisee of the Parable. It makes me hard. There is no pity in my heart for the weaknesses of my fellows.

Have I no weaknesses of my own? I carefully cover them up and fancy that no one notices them. I do not admit them even to myself because I am so busy thinking of So-and-So's failings.

Censoriousness leads me to be unfair in my judgment. It makes me biased.

It weakens my love of God. How can I feel any warmth of devotion when I am despising my fellow creatures—the work of my Creator's Hands?

How common is this sin of unkind talk, how frequent the cruel gossip, the unjust criticism. How I sin by my tongue—a tongue that was given to me with which to converse happily with others, to sing the praises of my God. Above all, that tongue upon which my Savior Himself so often rests.

I am afraid my ordinary conversation *is* about my neighbor and it is neither kind nor gentle. The world applauds a sharp wit, the smart criticism, and I like to please the world. When people laugh at my spiteful humor and little biting remarks, I am pleased.

Why do I look for the worst in people? If I went to buy groceries, I would not ask for inferior goods. I would look for the best.

If I know something unpleasant in the character of another, why do I drag it out, chatter over it, and tear it to pieces like a dog with a savory bone?

Is there something radically wrong in myself? My mind must be empty if I cannot discuss anything but the foibles of those about me. Is there nothing more interesting to talk about?

We all desire to be loved but the bitter-tongued critic, the tale-bearer, cannot be popular, however he may cause amusement for the time being.

I know how I shrink from criticism and how carefully I avoid those who have sharp cruel tongues.

Am I one of those who never have anything good to say of their neighbor? Maybe I am too

quick to blame, too slow to praise, too ready to join in unkind talk, or too prompt to say, “I told you so.”

Do I look upon the idle word as a pebble cast heedlessly into the pond? It scarcely disturbs the surface but if I watch I see the circles widen and widen over the circumference of the water until the whole is troubled. So an unkind word, idly whispered, may spread its mischief into the consciousness of others until it is exaggerated and twisted as the images in the water are distorted by its movement.

If I reflect the love of God in the mirror of my soul, my thoughts will be kindly and will lead to kindly speech and charitable conversation.

3. Criticism

I pride myself upon my intuition. I boast that I can sum up a character swiftly. If I meet new acquaintances, I can make a very shrewd guess at their qualities. I am not deceived by an agreeable exterior. No one can take me in. I see through all that veneer.

What do I see? Something far from pleasing, of course. I pick out the faults that no one else ever discovered. I could tell at once that So-and-So was not to be trusted. I knew very well that someone else wasn't half as clever as he was made out to be. I am proud of my shrewdness and I am quite as bad (if not worse) as any Pharisee. For, if I am honest, I shall realize that my criticism of the characters of others nearly always tends to be unkind. Instinctively, I look for the worst—not for the best.

I am first rate at damning with faint praise. I regard the efforts of others with a tolerant smile at best.

I am only too willing to point out how things could be improved. If I do not exactly say so, I imply it.

I am never satisfied with the work done by others. How much better *I* could have done it. There is always a “but” in my commendations. I hold the opinions of my neighbors in a certain contempt. I condescend to the great arts of music, literature, painting, and so forth, but there is always some defect that I can point to—a defect that no one has noticed before. I am critical about my best friends. Even in my parents, there are qualities I could improve upon.

But I am not critical of myself. In those minutes before Confession, which ought to be so quietly self-revealing, I hurry through my Examination of Conscience, glossing over my lapses, dwelling rather upon the faults that are easiest to admit, that hurt my self-respect least, and are in no way critical of my many sins against Charity.

If I took myself to task as sternly as I take even my most admired friend, those precious moments spent with my Lord in the close embrace of Holy Communion would make me sink into the depths of His kind Heart with shame and love in their revealing light.

Who am I to make myself judge? Our Lord has said, “Judge not and you shall not be judged.” Do I ever give a thought to that dreadful day when I shall stand before my Judge to render an account not only of my deeds, but also of my thoughts and words?

If I dread critics and fly from their presence knowing that their opinion of me will be unfavorable, that they will see through all my little vanities, and will pick holes in my small triumphs, let me realize that is exactly what I do to others. The coat looks very different when it is turned inside out and the shoe pinches when it is on the wrong foot.

When I think of criticism, I must not forget that it can be both constructive and destructive. The latter is what I practice. The former I should welcome with thankfulness and humility. If I am called upon to judge the actions of others, let my verdict be just, merciful, and helpful.

4. Gossip.

Gossip is rarely kind. Even if it is not actually sinful, it is at best silly.

The empty mind loves to pick up tid-bits of information, chatter over them, and pass them on. Inveterate gossips are as greedy for stories of their neighbors as gluttons are for savory morsels.

They pounce on the most trivial incident or any bit of news for which their eager ears are ever on the alert. The joy of listening, the delight in repeating for those that itch to know, ache to tell.

It goes without saying that the tale loses nothing in the telling. I find an unkind twist in it. I give it another and my hearers, probably, do the same. If I heard the same story recounted a week later, I should not recognize my handiwork.

It grows and grows like a snowball—would that it would melt as swiftly!

Gossip is petty. Only the idler can indulge in it freely. It is so often spiteful and it is mean because the persons I talk about are not there to defend themselves. It is like hitting a man when he is down.

There does not seem to be any end to it and what makes it so dangerous is that there is invariably exaggeration. Who can tell a plain tale without embroidering it? So Truth is set at naught.

I think that the sin of detraction leads very easily to calumny, because, when I have discovered the possibly well-known defects of my neighbor, I am very tempted to add a bit more to make my narration more interesting.

So gossip denies the words of the Psalmist, “Mercy and Truth have met together; Justice and Peace have kissed each other.”

Mercy, truth, justice, and peace are far from the lips of the gossip. I am I am hard, false, unfair, and provoking when I indulge in idle chatter. I may say I do not intend any harm, that I only meant to be amusing, that I merely repeated what I have heard (with a very slight addition), or that others are far worse than I. After all, I had the story on the best possible authority, and I made my listeners promise it would not go any further. I have plenty of excuses, but the harm is done. One cannot recall the spoken word.

I should take myself severely to task in this respect. I am well aware that theft can become a grave sin. Is it less grave to steal my neighbor’s character? I may be able to restore the goods I have purloined. Yet, can I, with the same facility, restore the good name of one whose honor I have defamed? My reputation is more precious to me than my worldly goods and so my

neighbors' reputations are dearer than anything they possess. Yet, I rob them of it by my malicious tongue and plunge yet deeper into sin as I let Truth go to the wall in order to receive the flattering laughter of idle listeners.

Let me abjure the trivial tittle-tattle of every day. The world is full of marvels and beauty—my own existence is full of incident—there is interest everywhere. Can I talk about things rather than people? Or if I must talk about my neighbor, can I for a change pass on some pleasant anecdote that will show him in a favorable light?

5. Two Points of View.

There are two sides to every question—the cloud and its silver lining—right and wrong.

I heard someone ask once, “Did you notice that woman sitting over there?”

“You mean the one with the scar on her face?”

The response was, “The one with the lovely golden hair?”

“Rain, rain,” grumbled another. “It hasn’t stopped raining all day.” Her friend inquired, “Did you notice the rainbow?”

Two points of view.

There are those who will always draw out the sweetness of life, who seek beauty, and overlook what is not pleasing. Then there are those whose eye will always fall upon the scar rather than upon the golden hair.

Which do I do? Do I look for the good in my neighbors, and, when I have found it, do I, like the woman in the Gospel story who has recovered her groat, rejoice? As the man in the parable with his ten talents, do I trade with them until I magnify the virtue I have discovered? Have I the knack of bringing out the best in others?

Or do I regard the seamy side—hoping for the best, but expecting the worst? Do I watch the rain and forget to look for the rainbow?

Most people respond to tolerance. Do I give it? If my usual point of view is pessimistic, my judgment of others will tend to take the less favorable view and I will see their faults before I see their good qualities. And everyone has plenty of both.

If I am a cheerful optimist, I cannot be really unkind, my opinion of my fellows will be hopeful, and I will expect to find good in them.

I once went to call upon two sisters. The elder, as she met me on the threshold, said, “Don’t brush against the door and spoil my fresh paint.” The other, as she let me out of the house later, said, “Don’t brush against the fresh paint and spoil your good coat.”

I have often thought about that small incident. Two points of view—mine and yours.

Sometimes I may have to give up my point of view and accept that of another. If I must, it I should do it generously, not in an ungenerous manner. I am a human individual with a right to my own outlook; but I have to consider the outlook and individuality of my neighbor. There

must be give and take. Life is unbearable without kindness. The world today is hard and cold. There is little love amongst us. We are all out for ourselves. I pursue my own doggedly, treading rough-shod on the feelings of others to get what I want. I pass on relentlessly towards my goal regardless of those who fail and faint by the way. I carry on. Someone else can see to them. It is not my job. I have to get on.

I only see one point of view—my own. I take care that my newly painted door does not suffer—my neighbor's coat does not matter. I am single-minded in this: I am going to have my own way, no matter at whose expense.

There is my point of view.

But there is God's point of view. What does He think of me and of the life I am at present leading? Is He satisfied that I am making due use of the countless graces He showers upon me? He has not placed me alone in this world. He expects me, by the law of charity, to give a helping hand to my neighbor. If I may say so, He looks for me to assist Him in His work among my fellow-creatures.

I am to look at things from His point of view—to regard my neighbors with His kind Eyes. They are His children, too. If I hurt them, I hurt Him.

I see only the rain. He sees the rainbow. I look upon the scar. He gazes upon the golden hair.

Two points of view—kindness and harshness, the optimist and the pessimist, the light and the shadow, the best and the worst, and God's view and mine. Which is better?

6. Rash Judging.

How quick I am to form a low opinion of others, to put a sinister interpretation upon their actions, or to read a hidden meaning in their words. How harshly I judge!

If I hear some scandal breathed, my impulse is to believe it at once for I am on the lookout for the faults of my neighbors and am ready to credit them with any breach of good behavior.

If I do not meet a certain individual at Sunday Mass, I jump to the conclusion that he was not there. If I hear that another has made a good business deal, I am inclined to believe that it could not have been done honestly. If I miss a trinket or a sum of money, I conclude that it was stolen.

Yes, if I meditate upon my reactions to the daily events of life, I shall see that my mind is bent on rash judging.

Even in the pettiest things. Someone has a pretty complexion—it cannot be her own. Another has beautiful hair—the color comes out of a bottle, of course. I will not give people credit for the good they do possess. If, on the other hand, I do not get my due—what injustice!

This habit of constantly ill judging my neighbors is very injurious to my character. How can there be true love of God in my heart when it is full of derogatory, sneering thoughts of His creatures?

Love is what the world is crying for today—generous, selfless, forbearing love.

When I reflect that the first Christians were identified by their love for each other, how ashamed I am! What must non-Christians think of us? What do non-Catholics think of our want of charity towards one another?

We are cradled in the same Faith, nourished with the same Sacraments, embraced in the love of our One Father. How do we show the bond we have in the common Fatherhood of God? How do we make ourselves distinguished as children of the Truth?

It is not for me to probe into the motives of others. I have quite enough to do to examine my own conscience without scrutinizing those of others. How can I tell the secret intention of that soul about whom I know so little? How can I pronounce upon the motive that prompted another to act in such a manner? It is not for me to judge, no matter how black the case looks.

The rash judgments to which I impetuously leap are nearly always wrong and I have never yet learned that one cannot judge a book by its cover.

“Judge not, and you shall not be judged,” says Our Lord. Yet, I judge unkindly every day. Often I have no grounds at all for the opinions I profess—often the wish is father to the thought. I *want* to think badly of others, I *want* to catch them tripping, and I want to feel that they are no better than I am. The evil in me wants to make mischief and make mischief it does.

For, do I keep my rash judgments to myself? Very seldom. Whether true or false, they must be triumphantly broadcasted abroad, so I may get the credit for having found information on some hapless individual.

This cruel and rash judgment leads to detraction and calumny and I have to examine my conscience seriously upon the harm I may have done.

The law of the land presumes a person to be innocent until proved guilty. Even the ordinary civil law will not condemn without a hearing.

But I would rather condemn first. I will pre-suppose guilt until innocence is proved. Most often, I do not trouble to find out the truth of the case.

I am a Catholic, decently brought up, taught to tell the truth, educated in my Faith, familiar with the Commandments, and quite aware that, besides Heaven, there is Purgatory and there is Hell.

At the very least, I must keep an open mind before I judge. Surely, I will not be content with that? I will try to make my judgment wide and generous—giving credit where it is due, and giving it pressed down and running over. I will be so much happier if I think well of others. There is a boomerang in rash judgment that rebounds upon the judge and sours the mutual intercourse of God’s creatures. Expect the best and the find best. There is good in the worst of us.

7. Scandal.

I think very lightly about giving scandal. If I shock people, I take it for granted they are straitlaced prigs. It does not enter my head to think that I am at fault.

Even if I do not give scandal by grave sin, there are a hundred ways in which I can harm my

neighbor's character. I cannot forget that dreadful sentence spoken by Our Lord, "Woe to the man by whom they (scandals) come. It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and he were cast into the sea."

Apart from the scandal I give by my actual sins, it is necessary for me to take care not to offend the prejudices of my neighbors. It is uncharitable of me to jibe at their religion, their politics, or their nationality. It is very wrong to hurt their susceptibilities even in ways that to me are perfectly justified, but in their eyes are not. "One man's meat is another man's poison." Everyone has a personal standpoint and individual ideals. I may put my Faith into disrepute by carelessly doing things quite lawful to me that yet may be against the possibly narrow opinion of non-Catholics. I might even thus discourage some groping soul from finding its way to the Truth.

Alas ! I seem to enjoy shocking people. It amuses me to see the pursed lips and the lowered eye. It makes me laugh to hear them utter that timeworn phrase, "It wasn't so in my time." To say the least, it is not kind to tread on other people's toes. There is a great want of charity in deliberately hurting the principles of others.

How often do I give scandal by my sins, making light of what I know to be wrong, perhaps to a weaker companion—glossing it over saying, "It is only this once No one will ever know, and so forth. What scandal I can give to those frailer souls who perhaps look to me for a lead! What scandal I can give by repeating an unkind or an unbecoming story! How can I tell the effect my idle deeds and words may have on the minds of others?

Have I ever made an insinuation to another, perhaps robbing him of his peace of mind and involving him in the horrors of scruples? I do not know. I shall never know what the effect of my bad example has been until I stand before the Throne of God to render an account of my works. Then shall I not be appalled to see the scandal I have given?

What excuse can I make? I have none. I have carried tales from one to another. I have talked about the sins of my neighbors, perhaps revealing some hidden fault. I have nursed falsehood until I have made myself believe it and passed it on as authentic information. I have made wild guesses as to the motives of those I do not like. I have run down their successes and belittled their virtues.

And Our Lord has told us—nay, commanded us—to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Oh, I am ashamed of the harm my spiteful tongue has done. I am horrified of the use I have made of that precious gift of speech, which was bestowed upon me so I might hold converse with my fellowmen. Above all, I sink to my knees in humiliation when I think that He, the All-Merciful, my Savior and my Judge, rests so often upon this wicked tongue of mine.

My Jesus, whenever the Sacred Host touches my tongue in the future, let me remember to breathe a prayer that I may keep my speech kind, pure, and gentle. Teach me to judge as I would be judged and to be forbearing and tolerant. In short, teach me to love my neighbor as myself.

FORGIVENESS.

1. Memory.

Memory is one of the three powers of my soul and it is, surely, a very gracious Gift of God.

By it, I let my thoughts travel back to my childhood, to my earthly recollections of my father and mother and my brothers and sisters and I know how happy we children were—so safe and so loved. My school days, too, were full of pleasant incidents. I had good fun with my companions. I like to call to mind the images of those who taught me—the head mistress of whom I stood in such awe, the other teachers who came and went, and the priests who visited our school to give us instruction now and then.

I dwell upon the holidays when I joined the family circle, and perhaps we went away somewhere together. I remember when I was ill, at different times, how good people were and how they spoiled me then.

Birthdays and Christmases were occasions of rejoicing. Secret preparations beforehand thrilled me and there were glorious surprises when the happy days dawned.

Of course, I remember some sadness, too—disappointments, failure to pass some exam, and other unhappiness. But they are over, and, if I muse upon them regretfully, the sting has gone out of the pain long ago.

I recollect dear friends and relatives who were taken from me by death. I miss their loved presence and, as I breathe a prayer for the happy repose of their souls, I thank God, too, that He let them touch my life and cheer it with their kindness and affection.

As I grow older in life and the years lengthen behind me as shadows extend in the western sun, my memories, too, stretch further into the past and crowd my mind with their bittersweet recollections.

Some beautiful things have marked my path—affection, loyalty, devotion. My intellect, also, has entrancing memories for me. Through it, I call to mind strains of exquisite music that I have heard, plays and films that I have seen, and books that have lingered in my mind. Perhaps I have been one of the lucky ones who has gone abroad. I can travel my journeys over again in memory, recalling the places I saw and the wonders displayed therein. I seem to hear once more the bewildering chatter of a foreign tongue and I seem to taste again the unfamiliar taste of the foreign food.

Or perhaps I was a sportsman and I have pleasant recollections of the games I played, the tournaments I entered, the glorious free sensation of swimming in the open sea, or the joy of riding or motoring.

On the whole, I have much happiness and many things of interest to remember.

Above all, I meditate upon the countless graces I have received, and the immense privileges that were mine. I think of my First Communion and the blissful rapture of that wonderful day.

What can be more beautiful than this use of my gift of Memory? I met a man once who had lost his memory. He was but half a man. Although he appeared to be happy enough in the present, one could sense the strain in his manner and the mute groping for something he could not find. I have never forgotten him.

Yet it might, perhaps, be better for some of us if we, too, lost our memory.

For how is memory used? Too often, it is used to remember wrongs, to nourish resentment, to brood upon injustice—fancied or real. Am I not too ready to remember the unkindness I have received or the occasions upon which I was unfairly treated? Oh, my memory is long—long when I think of the ill with which I have met; but how sadly short when I consider God’s mercies.

I am not just content with remembering injuries of yesterday and last week. My mind goes back—back to my early years to recall past ills. Then, I will not confine myself to my own, but must take up the cause of my family, my friends, my acquaintances, and my country.

I recall with resentment the wrongs of my ancestors. I dwell on them and ponder over them until I distort them with exaggeration. I live in the bad old days of the past. I revel in their prevailing injustice. I brood bitterly upon the days of persecution until it almost seems as if I grudged the very saints their martyr crowns. On the contrary, I should thank God upon my knees that their rich blood has bathed the soil of my native land. They hugged their chains, they embraced their wrongs, and they died, thanking their murderers.

I, too, will hug my chains. I will embrace my wrongs because I know that I can turn them into precious jewels of merit to offer to my loving Savior.

What is past is past and the past cannot be undone. If I do dwell upon the sufferings I have endured and the injuries I have received, let memory sweeten and soften their recollection and let me breathe a prayer for those who have given me cause to merit through suffering.

2. Apologizing.

I beg your pardon is a phrase not often heard today. At best, one hears, “Pardon” or the more nonchalant, “Sorry” with no sorrow at all in the tone of voice.

It may seem very trivial to think about this but the old-fashioned quality of politeness has its roots in the ancient Christian virtues of courtesy, chivalry, and consideration for others.

The habit of mind that prompts the quick apology is guided by a principle of kindness and the possessor of this will not easily bear rancor.

If I have offended—probably unconsciously—in a very trivial way or erred through accidental clumsiness, the right instinct for me is to make swift amends.

What does “I beg your pardon” really mean? I am wrong, I stepped on your foot, I stood in your way, I took your place, or interrupted you. I did or said something that vexed you. I did not mean to, I never thought, I am sorry, please give me your forgiveness.

That is really what I mean when I apologize. My instinct is to quickly right what I have done amiss.

Very trivial, I say. It is hardly worth considering. So let us look at the other side.

I know people who never ask for pardon. They push through queues. They stomp on my feet. They go into Confession out of their turn. They never apologize for their discourtesies. How annoying they are. How they put my back up and irritate me so that I can scarcely be civil to

them. It is their own fault if I am ill disposed towards them.

I know others who boast that they will never admit being in the wrong as it would be far beneath their dignity to say they were sorry for anything they had done. I heard one of these say once, "I may be wrong, but I will never apologize."

Do I find it hard to own up? Am I one of those who, for the life of me, cannot get out that word that sticks in my throat—that word to ask pardon when I have blundered? Do I feel it against my dignity to acknowledge that I am not always right?

A quick apology, as a rule, brings quick forgiveness and then all is well.

How often have I said or heard, "If only she had said she was wrong, I wouldn't have minded—but now—what happens —now?" Misunderstandings, offense, injustice—all can lead to revenge.

And all for the lack of a little common politeness.

3. Taking Offense.

There is a certain unhappy class of person always ready to be offended, expecting slights, snubs, and contradictions. I say, advisedly, unhappy, because I know that people who are always watching for unpleasantness cannot be happy.

In our modern slang, we call them huffy and touchy. Not a word can I say to them but they must take it up and twist it to some meaning disadvantageous to themselves.

They were the children at school who could never endure teasing, who never saw a joke if it was in the least against themselves, who resented the most innocent chaff, who sulked and brooded over trifles and turned the lightest retort into an insult.

I had no use for that kind of schoolmate. I left her alone. If one wants trouble, one is sure to find it.

There is a false humility in this attitude, too. Of course, no one listens to what *I* say.... I am not good enough for *them*" and so forth. The speaker does not really believe what she is saying.

The world has no time to waste on those who are forever misinterpreting the remarks and deeds of others. One simply does not bother to embark upon explanations that will only be misconstrued.

Do I take offense? Am I ready to misinterpret the words of others and do I jump to the conclusion that, if two of my friends are talking together, they must be disparaging me? Do I resent chaff and deliberately misunderstand the motives of my fellows? Do I fall into long, brooding silences and turn a deaf ear to amends that may be offered to me? In short, am I huffy and touchy myself?

If so, I am proud, unjust, selfish, uncharitable, and many other things. I nurse a dull feeling of resentment out of which grows a sensation of dislike and antipathy to others and, growing, assumes a magnitude out of all proportion to the initial offense.

In my sullen mind, I often credit my neighbors with motives unknown to them and nothing will convince my determined obstinacy or persuade me to soften and to forgive.

I think of myself—and of myself only. I think of how badly I was treated and of how unhappy I am. And I am unhappy—how could I be otherwise with this poison spreading over my soul?

Honestly, how often is taking offense justified? Is it not nearly always due to some misunderstanding? If people say or do anything uncharitable, do I not often beat them at their own game? Why should I resent a return of my own coin?

I should shake it off, like water off a duck's back. I should ignore the double meaning, pretend not to notice the insinuation, and join in the joke against myself?

The unkind jibe falls harmlessly to the ground when the victim treats it with good humor. Teasing does not come off so well when the dupe leads the laughter.

I will try to banish this petty resentment from my mind. I will try to correct this touchy, supersensitive attitude I have adopted. If I can learn to overlook generously these small annoyances and refuse to see offense, whether intended or not, when the big trials of life confront me, I shall be better able to forgive largely, as forgive I *must*.

4. Fair Play.

A sense of justice is deeply implanted in the human heart. There are few who do not like to see fair play.

I resent few things as much as the feeling that I have been done, that I have been passed over without due cause, or that I have been suspected groundlessly and pronounced guilty without proof. To use a familiar phrase, my blood simply boils. I find it hard to forgive injustice to myself, paltry lies told about me, or advantages taken of myself. I despise the poor loser who must win the game and cheats a bit in order to do so. I have the greatest contempt for my adversary at the card table who peeps over my hand.

Incidents from childhood have rankled in my memory—some favoritism displayed, an unfair judgment, or an unmerited punishment. These stick in my mind and bring a sense of dislike and animosity towards those who caused me to suffer thus.

Let me turn the picture round. Am I sure that I have always played fair? Have I been particular to right any injustice I may have caused? Have I been strictly impartial in my dealings with others? Have I been guilty of even mild deception or taken a mean advantage in a game? Have I sailed under false colors, letting it be thought that I am better than I really am? I am afraid I have not always played fair and what I despise in others I must equally condemn in myself. I do resent injustice and I do grow indignant at anything that is unfair. However, I see that I, too, am guilty in this respect. I will not forgive the injuries that I receive but I pardon my own lapses. That is distinctly—not fair.

When the sense of wrong rankles within me, I will turn to that monstrous travesty of human justice—the Passion of Our Blessed Lord—and I will take one sense to consider now.

When Pilate ordered Christ to be scourged, I think he took the first definite step in his

condemnation of Innocent Blood. Up to then, he had hesitated and had tried to get out of actual judgment. Up to then, he had not ill-treated his Prisoner. But this is what Saint Luke now tells us, "Pilate said, 'You have presented unto me this Man as one Who perverteth the people; and behold, I, having examined Him before you, find no cause in this Man in those things wherein you accuse Him . . . I will chastise Him, therefore, and release Him.' "

Does that not strike to the depths my sense of fair play? What would I say of a schoolmaster who said, "I don't believe this pupil of mine is guilty of what you accuse him. I can't find the slightest proof that he is."

"Anyhow, I will give him a good caning and let him go." Oh! What should I think of such a master? How furious I should be!

Yet, because my Savior has first trodden the path of pain and shown me that injustice must be borne and forgiven, I in my way must endure and forgive. He has taught me how to pardon my enemies, but I have strayed far, far from His teaching.

I sometimes think that the Scourging at the Pillar was the most unjust act of the Passion. I ponder Pilate's words, "I find him innocent, *therefore* I will punish Him."

My Jesus, teach me to endure wrongs patiently. Let me even welcome them, for I can turn them into such a wonderful source of merit if I will only bear them manfully and forgive them generously.

5. Revenge.

I like to get my own back and to give as good as I get. If someone does me an ill turn, I shall be sure to do one equally bad in return.

In short, I am an upholder of the tit-for-tat doctrine—ready to believe that because I am erred against, that gives me justification in hitting back. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth is my motto—I ought to have lived in the days of the Old Testament.

What does Our Lord say upon this subject?

"You have heard that it hath been said 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you not to resist evil, but, if one strike thee on the right cheek, turn to him also the other. . . ."

"You have heard that it hath been said, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thy enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies; do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you. And as you would that men should do to you, do you also to them in like manner."

Saint Paul says, "Revenge not yourselves, for it is written, 'Revenge is Mine, and I will repay,' saith the Lord."

I am a Christian and a Catholic. I know quite well that it is not for me to pay back any evil I have received. God is the supreme Judge and Avenger of us all and He says, "Revenge is Mine." I dare not steal from Him what He claims for Himself, no matter how much I feel justified in doing so, no matter how much satisfaction I fancy I will gain by taking revenge.

The satisfaction I think I will gain? I know from experience that, when I have taken revenge, my feeling is not one of triumph or satisfaction at all? On the contrary, I cannot get away from the sensation that I have lowered myself. I know I have acted against my conscience. I feel neither happy nor content. I have not gotten the better of my adversary because I have gotten the worst out of myself. We are not quits. Two wrongs will never make a right and no amount of ill doing on the part of another will ever justify my taking the law into my own hands and seeking revenge.

Evil grows of itself and a great deal too rapidly. I am doing all I can to propagate it when I take revenge and sin vies with sin and spread its poison all around.

It is, certainly, not easy to bear wrongs patiently. It requires a special grace of God for which I should earnestly pray. To take revenge deliberately is cold-blooded and vicious and I will never gain anything by it but an increase of hatred and ill will and the darkening of my conscience, which brings misery to my soul. Besides, I should never forget that the person I seek vengeance upon or criticize might be much closer to God than I am and eventually he may be higher in Heaven than I shall be, if I get there at all. Nay, at the very moment when I take my revenge, God may be looking upon him as on one of His special friends. Let me beware of injuring any friend of God, even the least, in thought, word, or deed.

6. Family Feuds.

I have read books about the vendettas of Corsica and Sicily and these tales were very exciting — feuds kept up from generation to generation, tribe against tribe, party seeking the downfall of party—until it seems as if the whole of the two islands must have been divided into two camps, hating each other bitterly and vowing mutual vengeance.

I did not give much thought to the actual question of right and wrong in the excitement of the story. The plot was laid in a country far away from my own and, in my ignorance, I possibly concluded that foreigners are in a different category to my own countrymen and that the Latin races are all hot-blooded, passionate, and revengeful.

But do we ourselves live so harmoniously together in our own land?

Are we distinguished for our mutual charity? Are we disposed to friendliness towards all our neighbors?

Even in my own limited circle of acquaintances, I have known (and probably taken part in) many bitter quarrels—quarrels that are never forgotten, quarrels that have gone on, perhaps, for years and years, until their origin is obscured in the mist of the years. Possibly, I have taken sides, championing the cause of my friends, keeping up animosity, and vilifying the other side with my tongue. I have delighted in cutting enemies in the street by looking through them when we met. I have disliked their very presence near me.

If I have done this, I have assisted in keeping up enmity and I have gone directly against the teaching of my Savior.

Some persons I know will not speak to each other. They cannot be invited to the same house together. They will not sit at the one table. Alas, that it should be so! Even in my small

experience, I have known brothers and sisters at variance, sons and daughters of the same parents who will not darken each other's doors, who, if they pass each other on the road, will do so without the slightest acknowledgement.

Two brothers will kneel side by side at the altar rails and receive their one Lord and Master and, with the Divine Presence still within them, will stare stonily at each other as they leave the Church.

Is this not truly deplorable? It seems incomprehensible that such people could ever be happy. Do they never feel the pull of the family tie? Can they repudiate their own flesh and blood? Is it possible that such an unnatural state of affairs can exist because of an offense committed years ago and exaggerated since out of all recognition? Can such persons repeat the words of the Our Father, "Forgive us our trespasses?"

The malice that delights in keeping up ill feeling is magnified a hundred-fold when it is found in the Christian family. The tradition of spite and hatred handed down through generations is a terrible inheritance. Awful will be the responsibility of anyone who has fomented this evil and stirred up and encouraged wicked passions of enmity within the Christian family.

Let me go through my own list of acquaintances. Is there anyone whom I will not acknowledge, anyone to whom I owe a grudge, anyone whom I will go out of my way to avoid? Let me seek them out and give them at least a smile.

Do I quarrel with my own immediate family? Of course, I do. I have tiffs with my brothers and sisters. No doubt, I have often told them that I will never speak to them again. That is my human weakness. I have erred in this respect again and again. But oh! My God, let me be quick to makeup and swift to make friends again. Do not let the sun go down on my wrath. My family belongs to me in a very intimate way. I must not be at enmity with a single member of it. Make me see how wicked it is to keep up malice or to continue an old feud as if it were an honorable family tradition.

It does shock me when I know brothers and sisters who will not meet one another. But am I not paving the way for such a contingency in my own family when I keep up quarrels and bear ill will?

Our Lord has said, "If, therefore, thou offer thy gift at the altar and there thou remember that thy brother hath anything against thee, leave, therefore, thy offering before the altar and go first to be reconciled to thy brother and, then coming, thou shalt offer thy gift."

So, I must even leave my prayers to make friends, for how can I pray if there is enmity in my heart?

7. Forgiveness.

Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us.

I repeat that sentence several times a day and it makes no impression upon me. I certainly cannot be heeding the words I am saying or the serious meaning of the words would frighten me.

I have been thinking about forgiveness in these pages. Perhaps it has helped me realize how I

abuse my memory by making it remember injuries or how, by my pride in denying a good-mannered apology, I bring into being a sense of hurt indignation. I see that, when I take offense, I allow the most trivial and often innocent remark to rankle and fester in my mind, which brings feelings of dislike and an absence of charity with the wound. I have become aware that I am one of those who, while justly resenting anything that is not fair, yet nurse my resentment until it is exaggerated out of all proportion. I am conscious that I enjoy giving back as good as I get, that I often plan for a revenge, which, when it comes off, brings me only a feeling of shame. I have trembled at the vindictiveness of the family feud. Gathering all these points into one, I realize that, when I give way to such faults, I am making it harder and harder for myself to forgive.

And forgive I must—wholeheartedly and sincerely.

I heard someone, who should have known a great deal better, say once, “I will forgive, but I will never forget.”

That sentence shocked me. I know that forgiveness is incomplete without forgetfulness.

When I read in the Gospel about our Lord’s dealings with sinners, I am struck at once by His wonderful kindness and by the quick pardon He gives to the sinner saying, “Go, and sin no more. . . . Thy sins are forgiven thee, go in peace. . . .” Above all he continues, “This day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise.” There is no allusion to what has gone before, no bringing up of the past. He gives complete forgiveness for true repentance and, with forgiveness, forgetfulness. He seems to have ignored the evil life the Penitent Thief had led at his first stammering word of sorrow. Why cannot I cast into oblivion all memory of the small ills I have had to endure at the hands of others?

I must do so, if I am to be forgiven.

It is a dreadful thing to say to my Maker, “Forgive me, as I forgive my neighbor,” if I insist upon harboring malice and fomenting family quarrels. God will take me at my word some day and if I shall be forgiven only as I have forgiven, how pitiable my lot! Let me realize this fully before I say the Our Father again.

I shall not be allowed to live a second life. There is no second trial. I do not know when I am going to die and, if God calls me and I go to Him with rancor and vindictiveness in my heart, how can I expect His mercy?

Oh, my Jesus, give me the peace that the world cannot give—peace with myself, peace with my neighbor, peace with You. Do not let me be a mischief-maker, a promoter of discord, a revengeful, remorseless member of the human race. Teach me to spread Your peace in my own little way—through my neighborhood, through my acquaintanceship, and, above all, through my own family. May I forgive readily and generously whatever ill is done to me—even thanking You for permitting the pain to come my way, so that, through it, I may be purified. Give me opportunity to reconcile those at variance and to show by my example how joyful a thing it is to forgive and to forget.

Then, when I kneel down to say the prayer that You Yourself taught us, let me say these words with a clear conscience:

“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” The world is sad enough, dear Jesus, let us not add to its sadness.

Nihil Obstat:
PERCY JONES,
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